

TURNER

Peace League  
or  
War League?

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# Peace League or War League?

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*ALMOST everybody believes in a league of nations; why not the League of Nations now offered us? Why does almost everybody believe in a league of nations? Only because they believe in the thing that they have been told a league of nations will bring to the world—permanent peace.*

*But any league of nations will not bring peace, however loudly it may shout that such is its purpose. There was a league known as the Holy Alliance. At the Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle it proclaimed that it had "no other object than the maintenance of peace. . . . The repose of the world will be constantly our motive." There are leagues of nations and there are leagues of nations. On September 12, 1918, Lloyd George announced that he was "all for a league of nations." The formation of the league, he said, was already under way; in fact, the British Empire was a league of nations. So was the Triple Entente, for that matter, and the Triple Alliance. All swore that their aim was peace.*

*But the Holy Alliance lived and died in a welter of war; the British Empire has fought more wars than any other country in history; while everybody knows what the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance did to the world.*

*Is this a Peace League or a War League? That is the question.*

# Peace League or War League?

BY JOHN KENNETH TURNER

PRESIDENT WILSON never, of course, pretended that *any* league of nations would bring permanent peace. Instead, he informed us that only one kind of league would do it. He was careful to lay down the plans and specifications, to assure America that it was fighting only for that kind, to pledge himself to accept nothing else. Do we get that kind of league? Mr. Wilson made it plain at every turn that the genuineness of a league of nations as a league of peace was to be determined, first, by its composition. It must be a league of all nations from the start. "A general association must be formed" (No. 14 of the Fourteen Points). "It cannot be formed now. If formed now, it would be merely a new alliance against the common enemy" (September 27, 1918). "She [the United States] would join no combination of powers that is not a combination of all of us" (December 30, 1918). Russia was not excepted, nor Germany, nor any other friend, foe, or neutral.

The second test of a genuine peace league was to be its government. It must be a league of absolute equals, a pure democracy. "The essential principle of peace is the actual equality of nations in all matters of right and privilege" (Inaugural Address, 1917). "The guarantees exchanged must neither recognize nor imply a difference between big nations and small, between those that are powerful and those that are weak" (January 22, 1917). "The strong and the weak shall fare alike" (April 6, 1918). Inner circles are a contradiction of equality; so inner circles are barred.

There can be no leagues or alliances or special covenants or understandings within the general and common family of the league of nations (September 27).

As a guarantee against clandestine inner circles, all secrecy is barred:

All international agreements and treaties of every kind must be made known, in their entirety, to the rest of the world (September 27).

For America, a pledge is offered in advance that it shall be a party to no inner circle, whether open or secret:

The United States will enter into no special arrangements or understandings with particular nations (September 27).

The third test of a genuine league of peace was to be its obligations. One stands out above all others:

Mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small states alike (No. 14 of the Fourteen Points).

Not guarantees for some states, remember, but for all:

The whole family of nations will have to guarantee to each nation that no nation shall violate its political independence or its territorial integrity. That is the basis—the only conceivable basis—for the future peace of the world (June 7, 1918).

The fourth test of a genuine peace league was to be its privileges—its absence of special privilege. There must be “a common participation in a common benefit” (January 22, 1917). This means, for all, “a participation upon fair terms in the economic opportunities of the world” (August 27, 1917). This means freedom of the seas: “Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war” (No. 2 of the Fourteen Points). “The freedom of the seas is the *sine qua non* of peace, equality, and coöperation” (January 22, 1917). This means no trade hostilities:

Special alliances and economic rivalries and hostilities have been the prolific source in the modern world of the plans and passions that produce war. It would be an insincere as well as an insecure peace that did not exclude them in definite and binding terms (September 27).

Finally, as a guarantee against the violent upset of our genuine peace league, or any of the fundamentals thereof, by a minority, every state, however virtuous, must render itself physically incapable of aggression:

Adequate guarantees given and taken that national arma-



ments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety (No. 4 of the Fourteen Points).

But the League of Nations excludes all former enemies and many neutrals. Even within itself it is a league of unequals. It has an inner circle, the Council; an inner circle within the Council, the Big Five; an inner circle within the Big Five, France-England-America; possibly other inner circles. No outside state is guaranteed against aggression. The seas are less free than ever in history. Economic hostilities have already begun. No secret international engagement has been published—not even the business understanding for which the Lansing-Ishii Agreement is a blind. No victor is reducing armaments.

If the President's League of Nations meets none of his prescribed requirements for a genuine peace league, how is it going to secure the world's peace? Time, we are told, will correct all shortcomings. But the five gentlemen who framed the League in secret, and who determined upon the charter members, have taken every precaution against time correcting anything. The covenant cannot be amended without the unanimous consent of the Council. None of the Big Five can ever be ousted from the Council. The Assembly can never over-rule the Council. Practically nothing can be done without the unanimous consent of the Council. New members are received, not on general terms open to all applicants, but on special terms laid down to the given applicant. No outsider may ever become a member without the unanimous consent of the Big Five, and on terms laid down by the Big Five; no outsider, having become a member, may ever attain equality with any of the Big Five without the unanimous consent of the Big Five; they may have nothing to say in the affairs of the Big Five, while the Big Five may have everything to say in their affairs. Any reform, or other generous undertaking, can be blocked forever by a single member of the Council. The covenant of the President's League of Nations makes it safe from democracy. If the gentlemen who promised the world a genuine league of peace really intended to give it to us, why

not give it now, instead of at some future time? And why should we accept a substitute?

How, indeed, can anyone hope that this particular League of Nations will ever bring peace to the world when its first concern is to guarantee a settlement that everywhere tramples upon the fundamentals of peace? The President himself made it plain that "the equality of nations upon which peace must be founded, if it is to last," was to be established not at some future time, but at once—in the settlement itself; that the league was only to give it permanency; that a league of equality could be erected only upon a peace of equality. We find that his pledges of a league of equals are inseparable from his pledges of a settlement of equals. Together they constitute the "Wilson terms." The obligation of mutual guarantees was simply the application to existing states of the basic principle of self-determination, which he promised even to subject peoples: "We shall fight . . . for the privilege of men everywhere to choose their own way of life and obedience" (War Message). "Self-determination is not a mere phrase. It is an imperative principle of action, which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril" (February 11, 1918). As late as Independence Day, 1918, he gave the following definition of the process:

The settlement of every question, whether of territory, of sovereignty, of economic arrangement, or of political relationship, upon the basis of the free acceptance of that settlement by the people immediately concerned, and not on the basis of the material interest or advantage of any other nation or people which may desire a different settlement for the sake of its own exterior influence or mastery.

Of how much importance to the permanency of peace, to democracy, to the world, to ourselves, was the Wilson plan for a settlement of equals and a league of equals? Let Wilson himself answer. Here is what he said of it, January 22, 1917:

These are American principles, American policies. We can stand for no others. And they are also the principles and policies of forward-looking men and women everywhere, of every



enlightened community. They are the principles of mankind and must prevail.

Here is what he said of his Fourteen Points:

For such arrangements and covenants we are willing to fight until they are achieved; but only because we wish the right to prevail and desire a just and stable peace such as can be secured only by removing the chief provocations to war, which this programme does remove. . . . An evident principle runs through the whole programme I have outlined. It is the principle of justice to all peoples and nationalities, and their right to live on equal terms of liberty and safety with one another, whether they be strong or weak. Unless this principle be made its foundation, no part of the structure of international justice can stand. The people of the United States could act upon no other principle; and to the vindication of this principle they are ready to devote their lives, their honor, and everything they possess.

Of the pledges of September 27, he said:

They [the issues of the struggle] must be settled—by no arrangement or compromise or adjustment of interest, but definitely and once for all and with a full and unequivocal acceptance of the principle that the interest of the weakest is as sacred as the interest of the strongest. This is what we mean when we speak of a permanent peace, if we speak sincerely, intelligently. . . . No peace shall be obtained by any kind of compromise or abatement of the principles we have avowed as the principles for which we are fighting.

The President's own words are the best answer to the treaty that he now asks us to approve. If you believe in the principles for which America was persuaded to give seventy-five thousand lives, see two hundred thousand of its young men wounded, pay out \$150 cash for every man, woman, and child of our population; submit to soaring living costs and countless forms of discipline and sacrifice, you cannot believe either in the settlement that is offered us or the League that is a part of it. If the President really cares for those principles, it would be impossible for him to offer us this substitute. If we really cared for them, it would be impossible for us to accept this substitute from him. Is it an accident that certain neutral nations were not invited to

join our League? That our League does not afford universal guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity? That self-determination is not provided for? That no adequate steps are taken toward a general reduction of armaments, that the freedom of the seas is forgotten, and all other essentials of a genuine peace league are lacking? Woodrow Wilson is a historian by profession. Did he expect, after assisting England to victory, to persuade that country to surrender her dictatorship of the seas, or to cut her navy to the size of the navy of America, France, or Germany? Did he expect to persuade England to grant self-determination to Ireland, India, or Egypt; Japan to grant it to Korea; France to grant it to Morocco; Italy to grant it to Tripoli? Did he himself ever intend to grant genuine self-determination to Porto Ricans, Filipinos, Santo Domingans, Nicaraguans, Virgin Islanders, and to Haitians? Would Lloyd George have been willing that his League of Nations should guarantee Persia against aggression by England? Would Orlando have been willing that his League of Nations should guarantee Abyssinia against aggression by Italy? Would Makino have been willing that his League of Nations should guarantee Siberia against aggression by Japan? Would Wilson, indeed, have been willing that his League of Nations should guarantee Mexico against aggression by the United States?

Was our League of Nations framed with a view to ending aggression upon weak states by the great and powerful, or, rather, to facilitating and sanctifying it? Will it, or will it not, afford America a freer hand for the "cleaning up" of Mexico for the benefit of Wall Street? There has been some complaint that America "gets nothing" out of the European settlement. The rise in Mexican securities on the Stock Exchange, the feverish preparations of great financiers to take immediate advantage of Mexican "opportunities," together with the artificially stimulated outcry for armed intervention, argue a strange confidence that a few of us are about to get something by war in lieu of the permanent peace that was promised all of us.

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